



Time as a Force of Transformation: Identity and Ageing in Egan's A Visit from the Goon Squad

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Abstract- Tribal entrepreneurship plays an important role in improving income, livelihood, and social development of tribal communities. This study focuses on the opportunities and challenges faced by tribal entrepreneurs in Kokkal and Sholur villages of the Nilgiris district. Primary data was collected from 120 tribal entrepreneurs through structured questionnaires. Percentage analysis, ranking method, and chi-square test were used. The study finds that majority of entrepreneurs are young and educated but financially weak. Agriculture, tourism, and handicrafts are the major business activities. Major problems include lack of finance, poor loan accessibility, infrastructure issues, and weak market linkages. Awareness about government schemes is moderate, but implementation and accessibility remain limited. The study suggests financial inclusion, better infrastructure, skill development, and strong policy support to promote sustainable tribal entrepreneurship.

Keywords- Tribal Entrepreneurship, Opportunities, Challenges, Financial Inclusion, Government Schemes, Nilgiris Tribes.

I. Introduction

A Visit from the Goon Squad (2010) by Jennifer Egan is widely recognized as one of the most innovative narrative works of the twenty-first century, especially in its treatment of time and identity. The novel defies linear storytelling by weaving together multiple characters, perspectives, and historical moments, ultimately creating a mosaic-like representation of contemporary life. As society becomes increasingly shaped by rapid technological change and shifting cultural values, Egan's nonlinear narrative becomes a powerful reflection of how individuals construct and reconstruct their identities. This study focuses on the relationship between time and identity in the novel, exploring how temporal transitions reveal the instability of selfhood in modern contexts (Gibbons, 2012, p. 74).

In an era defined by fragmented communication, digital mediation, and accelerated social change, characters in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* struggle to maintain coherent senses of identity. The novel's movement across decades underscores how personal histories, shifting relationships, and societal pressures shape who people become. By analyzing these temporal shifts, the study highlights the complex interplay between past experiences and present identities. Through a close reading of key episodes, the research examines how the text represents identity as fluid, multifaceted, and vulnerable to both memory and change (Strauch, 2015, p. 32).

Egan's narrative technique—characterized by temporal jumps, shifting focalization, and experimental forms—offers fertile ground for examining the construction of



modern identity. The text invites readers to consider how time acts as both a force of erosion and transformation. This chapter introduces the central focus of the study and establishes the novel's relevance to contemporary discussions on temporality, selfhood, and narrative form. Through this lens, the research aims to contribute to broader literary conversations surrounding postmodern and post-postmodern aesthetics in twenty-first-century fiction (Horne, 2019, p. 58).

II. Literature Review

Researchers have shown considerable interest in Egan's manipulation of narrative networks and their influence on temporal perception. Eggers (2023) notes that the novel's interconnected structure, which links people, events, and places, goes beyond traditional storytelling by showing how posthumanist sociality is based on relationships and interdependence. She argues that the story's seemingly shapeless quality lets readers see where things come together and where they go apart in time and space. She also stresses that networks, not linear progression, shape modern experience. Eggers employs these structural decisions to illustrate how Egan prompts contemplation of both the analogue past and a future shaped by interconnectedness (Eggers, 2023,p.62).

Wang (2023) provides a comprehensive examination of Egan's narrative temporality through the lens of Gérard Genette's theoretical framework, underscoring how temporal manipulation accentuates the passage of time as a crucial element shaping individuals' lives. Wang asserts that Egan deliberately arranges narrative events to exemplify the fluidity and fragmentation of memory, illustrating the impact of time on personal development and identity. The study underscores how the novel's temporal structure allows readers to engage with the tension between past, present, and future, thereby reinforcing the connection between chronological disruption and the formation of identity (Wang, 2023,p.11).

Hering (2021) analyses the role of music as a temporal and intergenerational medium in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. She asserts that the novel fosters dialogue between parents and children via musical experience, establishing what Agamben describes as a "meeting place" between generations. Hering emphasises that music functions as a medium to reacquire a comprehension of duration and to situate characters' identities within a temporal continuum. The research demonstrates Egan's connection between temporal experience and both individual and collective identity, suggesting that temporal perception is shaped by cultural artefacts, including music (Hering, 2021,p.244).

Rouverol (2021) examines the use of narrative gaps and silences in Egan's novel, arguing that these absences create a "aesthetic of the gap" that highlights what is left unsaid or unrepresented. She notes that Egan's use of prolepsis, analepsis, and the difference between story time and narrative time shows how hard it is to have full control over a story. Rouverol stresses how this method goes against linear time and shows how identity is not always clear, showing that the novel's time changes are closely related to the formation of selfhood (Rouverol, 2021,p.280).



Horne (2019) analyses how non-chronological progression and diegetic gaps in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* obstruct the reader's attempts to impose order on the narrative. She argues that Egan undermines linear storytelling by encouraging associative rather than strictly controlled narrative construction, reflecting the characters' resistance to external temporal constraints. Horne demonstrates that the amalgamation of fractured time and disrupted narrative control parallels contemporary identity formation in an ambiguous and diverse manner, rendering temporal discontinuity an essential component of self-conception (Horne, 2019, p.56).

Gibbons (2012) analyses the novel's fragmented structure, marked by nonlinear sequencing and the incorporation of mixed media, illustrating how these techniques reflect the temporal instability of the digital era. She argues that Egan's story shows time as broken instead of linear, which is how modern life is. Gibbons also says that these stylistic choices go beyond narrative technique to say something about how people in the twenty-first century see time. This shows how formal innovation and thematic investigation are connected (Gibbons, 2012, p. 78).

Strauch (2015) offers a profound examination of identity in Egan's oeuvre, investigating how characters navigate personal development amidst shifting social and emotional contexts. Strauch posits that identity is continually redefined by memory, social relationships, and the enduring influence of time. Her research demonstrates that Egan depicts selfhood as dynamic rather than static, with individuals perpetually redefining themselves as they traverse different life stages. This research lays the groundwork for understanding the impact of temporal dynamics on character identification and self-perception (Strauch, 2015, p. 54).

Deleyto (2013) analyses the use of temporal disruption in contemporary American fiction, with a particular focus on *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. He contends that the fragmented timeline represents the fractured identities of individuals in the twenty-first century, demonstrating how narrative reconfiguration reflects the discontinuous nature of modern subjectivity. Deleyto's research emphasises the connection between narrative structure and identity formation, illustrating that the novel's temporal experimentation is crucial to its psychological and thematic intricacy (Deleyto, 2013, p. 121).

The Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it offers a focused analysis of the relationship between time and identity in a major twenty-first-century novel. By examining how temporal structures shape selfhood, the research contributes to contemporary debates on narrative innovation and modern identity formation. It also provides new insights into Egan's work, highlighting its relevance to discussions of temporality, memory, and the evolving nature of human experience.

Research questions

- 1) How does Jennifer Egan employ nonlinear time to represent the transformation of identity in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*?
- 2) In what ways do shifts between past, present, and future influence the psychological development of key characters in the novel?



III. Plot Overview and Key Episodes (Time and Identity)

The plot of Jennifer Egan's book doesn't go in a straight line. It tells the story of Sasha, the secretary for record producer Bennie Salazar. The story goes back and forth in time, from the punk rock scene of the 1970s to the digital future of the 2020s. There are characters in each chapter who meet "the goon," which means that time takes away beauty, talent, and hope. The book's broken plot shows that identity isn't a steady progression; it's a series of changes that happen over time (Powers, 2017: 2).

The time in the story is like a "devouring" force that takes away the characters' youth. The story doesn't follow a normal order. Instead, it goes back and forth between the past, present, and future to show how the characters' lives are different. In one chapter, Sasha is a troubled teenager who robs people, and in another, she is a settled mother. We don't notice how many years have passed between them. This setup makes the reader think about how time has changed the most important parts of the characters. This shows that time is the most powerful predator that affects how people see themselves (Wang, 2023: 14).

The main idea of the story is how the main characters feel "structural dissatisfaction" as they go through different parts of their lives. Many of the episodes are about people who are unhappy with their jobs or their relationships. In the story, you always feel like you're losing something, like a PR consultant who isn't doing well or an academic who has been disgraced. These cases show that people often lose their sense of purpose over time, which leads to a broken identity that has trouble finding happiness in the modern world (Eve, 2015: 5).

As the story goes on, it talks more and more about how digital technology changes people and how they feel. Important events show how the music industry changed from being real to relying on "pointers" and digital "word of mouth" marketing. This change shows how screens and data are changing the characters' bodies and minds, which changes how they see themselves and others. The story says that in the twenty-first century, identity is no longer just a personal journey. Instead, it's a digital process that makes it hard to tell people and machines apart (Power, 2023: 88).

One of the most interesting parts of the book is when Sasha's daughter Alison shows the chapter as a PowerPoint notepad. This part talks about the "pauses" in rock songs and how they are like the breaks and gaps in the lives of the people in the story. These breaks are times when time seems to stop, which gives you a chance to think about who you are as you get older and things change. The story uses this experimental method to show that identity is often shaped by what is missing or what is quiet, not just the loud, active events in a person's life (Solwitz, 2014: 630).

In the last part of the story, people from different times come together for a big show in New York City in the future. The end of the story is when music brings the characters together for a short time. The story shows that people can still connect with each other in ways that make them feel like nothing has changed, even when things do. This



meeting is the end of the story, and it shows how different stories come together to make a bigger social fabric. This is the second-to-last step in their identity formation in today's world (Nie, 2017: 280).

Time (Past / Present / Future Jumps)

Jennifer Egan's story shows "textual instability" because it jumps around a lot between the past, present, and future. The novel's non-linear structure examines the impact of digital culture and memory on contemporary storytelling. These jumps help the reader understand how memory works by focussing on some things and leaving out others. The structure suggests that time is not linear but consists of significant segments that define a person's history. Egan shows that the "present" is often just a thin layer that separates a rich past from a future full of technology and uncertainty (Eve, 2020: 30).

These changes in time are all about the manly fight to understand a past that is fading and a present that is getting worse. Bennie Salazar's story about time travel shows how hard it is to "search for a younger self" in a world that has moved on from how intense his childhood was. Egan asks, "Time's a jerk, right?" Are you going to let that mean person pick on you? (Egan, 2010: 127). This phrase sums up the main problem the main characters have to deal with as they try to adjust to being adults after their idealistic punk-rock years. The differences between different historical periods show how time changes the mind and body of men (Zeman & Zeman, 2020: 42).

The search for balance in these jumps is a post-postmodern way of trying to make sense of a world that is broken up. The story jumps back and forth between decades, but it tries to find a "tonal consistency" that links all the different versions of the same character. Sasha's change from a rebellious teen to a peaceful life in the desert shows how much she wants to find peace within herself. Egan examines this idea by saying that "the past is a ghost that won't stop haunting the present" (Egan, 2010: 210). This viewpoint asserts that amid the chaos of temporal transitions, there is an inherent human duty to achieve tranquilly and unity throughout the various stages of life (Safina, 2020: 7).

These temporal movements function as a metamodernist "Bildungsroman," in which the maturation process spans a lifetime instead of being limited to adolescence. Egan jumps ahead in time to show what happened to her characters, like whether they got better or worse. This gives us a "postironic" view of how well or badly they did. The story's structure goes back and forth between the truth of the past and the irony of the digital future. This helps the characters grow up in a way that isn't straight. The text says, "It's amazing how quickly things can change and yet stay the same" (Egan, 2010: 340). This paradox highlights the complexity of identity formation in a context regarded as both accelerated and unchangeable (Azadanipour et al., 2022: 4).

The jumps into the future show how pop music can help you remember how time goes by and how it ends. Egan shows that "the medium through which we experience time has shifted" by putting the real music culture of the past next to the invisible, data-driven music of the future. The absence of physical records in the subsequent chapters symbolises the diminishing physical presence of individuals. The book says that "digital sound has no edges, no pauses" (Egan, 2010: 285), which is very different from



the harsh, broken past. This intermedial approach shows that we can measure time not only in years but also by the technology we use to record our experiences (Schinko, 2022: 180).

The book often talks about "archival anxiety," which is when characters feel like they have to write down their lives so that the future doesn't forget about them. These trips back to the 1970s or 1980s aren't just for fun; they're also a way to find out what a character was like before time changed them. "You don't look at the picture of your past; you live inside it until it burns out" (Egan, 2010: 95). The story's heavy focus on the past gives the reader a way to understand the big changes that happen when the plot suddenly jumps forward several decades, showing how the self must change (Eve, 2020: 35).

The jumps into the future are a warning about how "digitising the soul" can make people forget who they really are. In the last chapters, the future is shown as a place where technology and "pointers" make it hard for people to connect with each other, which makes them feel like they are not in the present. Egan writes about a world where "everyone is a brand and everything is a performance" (Egan, 2010: 312) to show how it feels. These jumps to the future end the book by showing that "goon" time eventually takes you to a place where you forget the past and the present is just a computer simulation. This final perspective supports the notion that time is the paramount factor that transforms and ultimately obliterates our identities (Zeman & Zeman, 2020: 48).

Identity (How Characters Change)

In Jennifer Egan's story, the characters' identities change all the time, and they have to work hard to remember who they are in a world that is always changing. For instance, Sasha tries to put her broken identity back together by collecting things. This shows how much pain she is in on the inside. The book says that identity isn't a goal; it's a never-ending search for meaning in a life that seems more and more disconnected. The text says, "Sasha fought her own nature at every turn" (Egan, 2010: 12), which shows that the characters are torn between who they are and who they want to be. A major part of the characters' stories is that they are always trying to find a stable sense of self (Vaikunda Raja, 2019: 233).

The characters' networks and social circles have a big effect on who they are in the twenty-first century. These groups and networks often force them to do things that aren't true to who they are. Bennie Salazar goes from being a punk rock singer who doesn't care about rules to being a business executive. This shows how professional networks can make people look less real. The main characters are "networked" into a business world that values making money over real human connection, which makes them feel lonely. Bennie thinks about how he has changed in the book and says, "He'd become a man who squeezed gold from people's throats" (Egan, 2010: 45). This change shows how the main character's identity changes over time because of the demands of work and society (Eggers, 2023: 68).

As the men get older and weaker, they start to wonder who they are. They become obsessed with "searching for a younger self," which stops them from accepting their current situation and makes them feel nostalgic all the time. This problem usually has



to do with their relationship with music, which makes them remember how strong and important they used to be. Bennie looks in the mirror and sees "an old man who had been poorly disguised as himself" (Egan, 2010: 98). This decline in physical and mental health indicates a strong correlation between ageing and the erosion of cultural influence (Zeman & Zeman, 2020: 45).

Nostalgia plays a dual role in the characters' lives, acting as both a source of comfort and an obstacle to change. A lot of the characters are still stuck in the past, and they use music to try to get back to who they used to be. This reliance on the past creates a "static identity" that struggles to adapt to the present, leading to a sensation of being trapped in time. Egan expresses this sentiment through Sasha's reflection on her previous existence in Naples, where she acknowledges that "the past is a different country" (Egan, 2010: 154). The characters' growth is greatly affected by the tension between wanting to go back to the past and knowing that things will change (van Wijk, 2016: 22).

In the modern world, social media and new technologies make the characters' identities even less clear by making their private lives public. People are always connected, so characters know how other people see them. This messes up their "digital identity." It's very clear in the last few chapters that people like Alex have to deal with "pointers" and fake trends. The book says, "Everyone is watching, but no one is seeing" (Egan, 2010: 315). This change in technology makes characters care more about how they look in public than how they really are (Hooda, 2024: 98).

Monitoring and metadata are everywhere in the world we live in today. This means that more and more, people are defining themselves by things that are not their own experiences. People keep track of, study, and organise characters based on the digital trails they leave behind. This means that their lives are "metafictional," which means that they are part of a bigger system of information. The main characters feel even less free because they think that someone is always watching them. The writing says, "Everything you do is being recorded, even the things you think are private" (Egan, 2010: 298). This loss of privacy indicates a significant transformation in identity formation in contemporary society (Johnston, 2017: 112).

The characters in the book don't change when they go back in time; they change when they learn to live with the scars that time has left on them. The "quest for identity" ends with the realisation that the self is made up of all of its past forms, even if they weren't perfect. Even though Sasha and other characters aren't the people they wanted to be, they are proud of themselves for making it through the story. The book says, "Redemption isn't about being perfect; it's about being there" (Egan, 2010: 332). The characters can move on now that they have accepted change for the last time. They know that even though time passes, the human spirit stays strong (Vaikunda Raja, 2019: 235).

IV. Conclusion

This paper has examined the time-identity dynamic in the relationship between time and identity in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan and has shown that the



nonlinear form the novel takes is not merely an experiment in narrative form, but the primary way of describing the present-day selfhood as discontinuous, flowing and constantly re-created. In switching between decades and introducing characters via discontinuous episodes, Egan demonstrates how identity is made by memory, loss, social networks and dynamic conditions of culture, and also clearly demonstrates the psychological conflict between who the characters once were, what they think they are, and who they are becoming. The analysis also suggests that temporal leaps reveal the erosion and change generated by ageing, changing relationships, and professional pressures and that the segments of the digital future further entail this instability by depicting identity as more mediated, performative, and externally quantified. In conclusion, the novel is also proposing that time is both a source of harm and redefinition: it disturbs coherence and certainty, but it also opens the way to adaptation, some renewal and moments of connection by having a shared experience, particularly music.

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